

## The Lowenfeld World Technique

### Demonstration of Pre-Verbal and Symbolic Thinking

#### At The International Congress of Psychotherapy

Zurich July 21-24. 1954

In this demonstration are presented:

#### A. Actual Worlds

Four actual Worlds (A-D), as made by children and reset-up from the working diagrams recorded at the sessions.

A series of three Worlds (E) as made by a boy at a single session.

#### B. Representations of worlds

Drawings in black and white and in colour by Miss Enid Kotschnig of New York, of Worlds made by adults and children (intended as illustrations for a textbook).

Drawings recorded by members of the I.C.P. group of Worlds made by children and adults.

#### Actual Worlds

**World A** An intelligent, well-grown boy of 15 referred, after treatment from many medical and psychiatric physicians, for enuresis from birth, made this World in the Consultation session.

A Manor House stands along in the centre of the tray; a small figure of a woman (carefully chosen) stands outside the house. On the right is a pond out of which come two crocodiles, one of which has taken hold of a boy in football clothes (carefully chosen); behind the house a rhinoceros chases a similar figures; in the curve of the shrubberies a lioness lies in wait. The woman is unaware of any of these happenings.

The maker's awareness of anything unusual in his presentation, illustrates the validity and importance of the technique of administration. Following upon the making and discussion of this World came the first five dry nights of his life.

**World B** A boy of 11 ½ of quite exceptional intelligence from a professional family was referred for petty pilfering and isolation: his capacity for imaginative, verbal compositions, was of extraordinary quality, showing an exceptional power of logical and constructive ability, originality and intellectual understanding.

World B is the second World he made. It consists of separate groups of figures: in the centre are two processes, beside them a group of dwarfs; in the front of the tray a man with a whip trains wild animals; there are two stationary cars and a man and woman in conversation; at the further side on the left are Punch and Judy, and Ice Cream Cart; in the right far corner is a newspaper boy selling a paper (and has a reference to the pilfering incident for which he was referred.

This incoherent fragmentary World, which the maker could not account for, is in striking contrast with the well-integrated humorous mature quality of his work in other media.

**World C** Made by an intelligent girl of 9 1/3 I.Q. 130, who came from a culture and well-disciplined family, but was herself of passionate and dramatic temperament. The world was made during the first weeks of treatment.

In the centre of the tray is a Manor House with an oblong garden, a garden table outside the house on a lawn, the rest of the garden filled with a wood; in this wood is a witch and a buried little girl who is said by the maker to be the therapist. Across the top of the tray runs a train, across the bottom a stream; up the right and left sides are roads, the right hand empty, a bus on the left.

The points of interest in this World are the appearance of a straightforward transference relation to the therapist together with one of the commonest group of symbols indicating unrelating energy.

**World D** Description will be found in the series of Worlds Type XII Worlds 33-36 p.11 and 12.

**World E** Three Worlds which were made during a single session are set out here together to illustrate the way in which the interaction between the patient and therapist takes place and is expressed, in words by the therapist, in Worlds by the patient.

These three Worlds were made by an intelligent grammar schoolboy of 15 referred for fear of going to school

The sequence was as follows:

1. A cage with a runway contains four lions; they are performing a circus act to unseen audience and a man has his back to the lions and is bowing to the audience. The therapist pointed out that here was a picture of very fierce wildness which had been tamed and was now obeying orders.
2. A path through a forest in Canada; a log across the path; a bear on the log; a cowboy riding home is suddenly faced with them. The therapist said that what he had made here was a contrast to i: a man suddenly confronted with quite untamed fierce-wildness; what was the man going to do about it? The boy said he did not know, and the therapist remarked it was as bad as being suddenly confronted with school.
3. The boy then made a rodeo; in the little pens are cowboys and cowboys on horses, waiting their turn; in one pen a bull waiting to be ridden. Therapist pointed out he had chosen a cow for the bull; boy explained he wanted big horns and there were not any big horned bulls. In the arena are other cowboys and horses, and a wild horse with a clown trying to distract him. Therapist pointed out that he had worked out several possible answers to untamed wildness; it could be controlled by skill, or jokes could be made at it, or about it, so that is ceased to be frightening.

These are grouped in thirteen types which illustrate certain varieties of Worlds relative to the conception of the Lowenfeld World Apparatus as a 'language'.

### **Type I. Use of Sand, Water and Amorphous Objects only**

- No. 1      A World made by a boy of 10 years I.Q. 148, referred for intense nervousness, fear of meeting new people and backwardness at school. **World.** He called it a maze. In the middle was a round mound almost like a ball with a cave in it; from there the maze winds round with false ways, eventually to a sort of hillside, with two tunnels in. If you go through one tunnel, then climb steps to the top of the mound, go down again, you go through a third tunnel and get back to the centre of the maze. The substance of this to the patient was the presentation of a very complex combination of a body-image with Proto-system ideas.
- No 2      is not strictly a World but illustrates the use made both with and without a World tray by adult patients and children to work out problems of the

body-image. This was constructed on a concrete floor by a schizoid young woman, 11 months after having made the two anatomical drawings of the back and the front of her body which showed a reasonably adequate cognitive grasp. This illustrates the same point as World C. (See also No. 31).

**Type II. Use of sand and water plastically with addition of selected items from the World Cabinet to bring out the 'meaning' of the presentation.**

- No 3. **Man island.** World made by a professional man of 30, early in his treatment. It no resent on island which is in the shape of a body without hands of feet. There is no right ear and the left ear is a harbour for ships. There is a tunnel in the throat, and groups of houses at various points on the body with ladders and paths going up and down them. On discussion, it became clear that, although he had never put it to himself consciously, this represented exactly what the maker felt the attitude of his family towards him tom be: that is to say, he was to them a convenience, something to climb about on, and his ear a harbour for their conflicts.
- No 4. Made by a young married man suffering from impotence. He made the World spontaneously, and only after it was made, realised (through discussion, association, amplification etc.), the guilt (gallows) associated in his mind with the feminine vulva, and the primitive concept of injury that had to him represented coitus.
- No 5. A similar use of the material by a boy of 8 ½, referred for constantly feeling unwell, for being dependent and babyish, having nightmares about snakes and tigers eating people up; and for hatred of school.

He made a rounded mound with a nipple on top, and 2 holes in either side of it; round it was a moat, then a wall, and two stretchers as bridges across; round that was a road on which was a horse and cart. The middle was an ancient roman castle; it was a prison, and you go into the holes in the top to get to the deep cover beneath. Later 'they' find there is a rich clot of seaweed in the castle, and destroy the castle to get it, as it is all in the rock. Therapist said: 'you have to destroy the castle to get it?' and he nodded. Asked what the iodine was for, he said it was used for cuts that might go septic. A fat man used to live in the castle; he is now angry as there is also a rich cloth of gold in it that has been taken with the seaweed; now he can only live in the open air with his hold furniture. The walls, however, are still there, as they only took the inside, so the gold furniture is put in the walls and a roof build over it, so now the fat

man will think it has all been a bad dream. It will be just as it was except for seaweed.

### **Type III. Mounds**

These constantly occur, both singly and as centre of concentric circles of water and land, and in association with tunnels caves and mazes.

**Traditional.** On Greek vases (e.g. Caeretan vase; from 'Monumenti-inediti' VI-VII, pl.77), a rounded mound frequently appears with trees, animals and fertility 'daimons'. In Nordic myth this form appears as the mountain Midgard upon which the arch of Heaven rests; Midgard is encircled by the sea, and the sea by the outer world of giants and frost. The tree (Yggdraisil) supports and nourishes the whole system, with three roots extending to the three dimensions; around one root is a serpent/dragon; by another root is Mimer's well.

Three other concepts occur constantly in association with these, that of the cave with its treasures, the maze and the volcano. All of these are spontaneously produced in Worlds.

- No 6. A schematic drawing of some common variants of mound themes which are constantly found in Worlds of children and adults.
- No 7. A mound made, on his second visit, by a boy age 7 ½, referred for fear of going to school and outbursts of rage.

The mound, called a castle, has two tunnels crossing each other on top. The following groups of objects are arranged on its sides: (1) Redcoat firing cannon. (2) 'Baddie' on a horse coming to rescue his two tied-up friends and kill their guard. (3) A khaki soldier hiding with a cannon and just as (2) was going to shoot, this man shot him off his horse. (4) 'Two men talking'; a knight; a 'goodie' looking for the 'baddies' to kill them. Above (4) is a 'bandit'. (5) Indian helping the knight and the 'guard' standing by.

Right side. The 3 bandsmen are 'soldiers coming to help the knights'. The sitting Indian is good. The standing Indian is bad and going to fight the good. On the other side of the hill is a Mountie standing watching, and a knight guarding the aeroplane which has brought the soldiers. An Indian is firing an arrow at the tied-up people who are bad. The green man is good.

As in mythology the fundamental forms have many aspects and functions which tend to merge into one another, so the same fundamental forms recur, either singly or in combination, both in the work of a single patient, and, in almost identical presentation, in the work of different types of patients.

## **Type VI. A world series as straightforward statement of life situations**

This series was made by an American High School student of 18, I.Q. 160, who was sent to England for treatment for inability to do schoolwork or make social contacts.

- No. 14      **First world.** A man stands with his back to a tree and is attacked by wild animals.
- No. 15      **Second world.** A train takes a figure of eight in a desert, and a very small farm cart slowly moves in a straight line without a goal. On the left is a 'scaly beast'. The maker felt that this World expressed civilisation for him.
- No. 16      **Third world.** Between high hedges a man chases a 'muse' who forever eludes him. On either side of the hedges pleasant social life is going on, but the hedges prevent him reaching it.
- No. 17      **Fourth world.** A pleasant park with the statue of a urinating boy in the centre of four roads. (It was exceptionally well done)

## **Type VIII. Worlds showing fragmentation.**

A unique quality of the L.W.T. is the opportunity it gives to study the simultaneous presence of mutually exclusive aspects of experience, and of all forms of fragmentation.

**Class I.** World B illustrates the type of fragmentation which occurs in schizophrenic patients, young children, and isolated individuals of high intelligence. The characteristic of this class is the absence of contact between the groups.

**No. 20**                      Made by the same boy who made World B.

Considerable organisation had taken place in the Proto-system in this boy by the time this World was made, and a process of integration between the Proto- and Deutero-Systems is taking place.

The World is in two parts: In the upper right hand corner a teacher is taking a class during an ordinary school period. In the rest of the World two separate elements are presented: a) a rapprochement is taking place between cowboys and Indians; b) farm animals are carrying on quietly and are unaware of cowboys or Indians.

The maker's comment was that the teacher thought that she was 'really teaching' the class, but the rest of the World was a presentation of what was actually happening.

**Class II.** Superficially this type resembles the first, but analysis with the maker shows an ideational or/and emotional linkage between the items.

**Class III.** Is a combination of universal and individual symbols which constantly recur in different groupings. Nos. 23 and 24 illustrates this type.

**No 23.** This is the **eight World** made by a boy of 7, I.Q. 134, referred for difficulty in reading, unhappiness, thumb sucking and bursts of rage. It is divided in two by a wall which separates it into two contrasted sections. The right hand section was intended to be an ordinary street with shops and people shopping. Just before completion of World a dragon was put on the roof of the largest house. On the left side are grouped families of animals. Among them are placed telegraph poles, two skiers and a Highland band which had often appeared previously in his Worlds. These are said to be 'just standing' not doing anything. In the left hand bottom corner, a lion and soldiers are said to be 'just attacking' (no enemy present).

**No 24.** **Tenth World.** Made after gap in treatment of some months. River lengthwise across tray divides World into two unequal portions. A lorry with sand in the foreground is said to be going to block the river. In the foreground British soldiers are said to be fighting Red Indians and the Indians are fighting the animals. On the further side of the river a group of aeroplanes on rising ground are going up and down. A very big lion attacks them and an ambulance stands by. In the confused group on the left, the Indians are attacking the animals, the cowboys and the soldiers are fighting the Indians. A tractor appears in the middle, and two figures of indefinite significance are tied to a tree trunk.

### **Type IX. Worlds showing gradual development of meaning**

Many early Worlds seem entirely static and empty of meaning. If, however the first items used are carefully noted and watched for in subsequent Worlds, the true significance of the original World will gradually appear. Nos. 25, 26, 27, are selected out of a long series of material made by a severely schizoid young woman, in order to illustrate this point.

**No. 25** Made at the beginning of treatment; it appeared to be entirely realistic and banal; the patient was unable to say anything about it at all. The

main features of this World are pleasant country house, with a park and parallel rows of flowering trees, and a little girl playing in the garden.

**No. 26** Made some time later without memory of No. 25. The true meaning of the first World row appears. Once again there is an attractive peaceful fenced-in garden with a country house and a curving from the front of the house, and this time the mother and father of the little are sitting on a flagged pavement outside the house. The little girl is playing with her doll's pram in the garden. Outside, across the end of the garden, runs an ordinary road with ordinary traffic and trees on the further side. All look most peaceful. But outside the fence on all three sides is a wood. In the left hand wood lives a witch; in the wood behind and to the right are wild animals between the back of the house and the fence stands another house. The road outside looks normal, but in the wood on the further side are hidden attacking Red Indians. The little girl felt that her parents and all grown-ups were safe unaware of the dangers, but that all these dangers were focussed on herself and continually surrounded her and might even invade the garden.

**No. 27** Made a considerable time later. Here the house and garden, as in No. 25, are reproduced in the bottom left corner; the wood now faces the gate at the end of the garden, and at right-angles is a second path and gate. In the wood Red Indians and wild animals have met and become friendly and are coming to ask the little girl to be their Great White Chief. She is crouching on the inner side of the gate, watching them. She would like to come out and say yes, but she feels that if she does so life will either become a dreary emptiness of conventional boredom, as in the street on her right. She has nevertheless the feeling that perhaps somewhere connected with this destruction, there might be 'something splendid' (badly drawn, in the top right-hand corner which should present pure panache, with a savage hiding behind a bush threatening it).

### **Type X. Worlds presenting psychiatric states**

**No. 28** (a) **Ideas of reference.** A small figure crouches as he moves along an empty street. In actual fact no one is interested in him, but he crouches because he feels that by every window blind stands somebody looking out hostilely at him.

(b) **The gulf between the self and the self.** Here are two people, very similar to each other, who know of each other's presence and wish to join each other. One is within two rows of houses the other in a surrounding wood. If the one within starts to join the one without, the

houses close together against him. If the one without starts to join the one within, the trees close up and prevent him.

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### **Type XI. World illustrating psycho-somatic states**

**Enuresis/Neurosis** World A, D, Nos. 22, 33-36, 42. 31a and b were made by a girl of 10, I.Q. 78, of a working-class family who had suffered from infancy from very severe asthma.

**No. 31a** A police car and a fire engine are about to go under an arch on a road

**No. 31b** The same items are now repeated, but in a setting, which reproduces the child's own surroundings.

The underlying structure of this child's asthma turned out to be centred round a conflict concerning aggression.

**World D.** In this World all the themes except the water are combined. The traffic becomes the impedimenta of the Fair; the erect sticks the World No. 33 now appears functionally as the barrier for the circus; the 'portals' of World No. 35 become the entrances to the circus; the 'portals' of World No. 35 become the entrances to the circus; the irrational symbolic use 'up and down' is expressed in the ladders laid purposelessly against the sticks at the entrances; the fire which burned up paper now warms the performers. There are no spectators because C. is all the spectators. It is important to him that the circus performance and the places where the performers sleep together are presented simultaneously.

After this there was considerable improvement in his whole attitude to life, himself, and the family.

**No. 36**

a) Two weeks later C. started out upon the first piece of competent construction he has ever done. This World represents the forth bridge (over which he goes to join his father). The material for the construction was carefully sorted out, and every bit of it was done by himself, and sensibly and competently carried out. What he wanted to express was the size and the majesty of the trains on the Forth Bridge as compared with the small passenger and goods trains running along the side of the river.

b) A fortnight later C. staged his first 'fight'; himself versus the therapist. On his side were all the large and fierce looking horse (mostly without riders); on the therapist's side a thin line of red Indians. (During the last two sessions he had for the first time begun to order the therapist about). As soon as the battle began C seized the largest and fiercest horse and charging across the tray forcibly 'killed' all the therapist's Indians. These were then collected together into two heaps and a circular burial mound made over each heap, each mound being surrounded by a ditch.

These Worlds give a very faint indicator of the complexity and interdependence of each aspect of C's work, within which Proto-system though, wish-fulfilment, phantasy, unconscious conflict, phantastic concepts of the body-image, sensorial experience, experiment and reality-testing all appeared.

(ii) Nos. 37-40 are a series of four Worlds made by a gifted, very introverted, and profoundly inhibited, intelligent and cultured young University woman graduate, during a period of treatment.